

The Random jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

Alice Nutter did not in fact ever live at Roughlee Old Hall

Alice Nutter did not in fact ever live at Roughlee Old Hall (as legend has had it for some 411 years) 2023.

Alice Nutter did not in fact ever live at Roughlee Old Hall (as legend has had it for some 150 years), her home was on the Crowtrees estate some half a mile to the west. Nor did she have the riches and estates that Potts would have us believe, she was wealthier than her companions in the Well Tower dungeon at Lancaster but any real wealth would have stayed with her Whitaker family outside of the forest. It is an integral part of the Alice Nutter legend that her family refused to speak up for her and actively allowed her to be prosecuted in order to gain her estates. Nutter (Alice O'Dick O'Miles) In 1561 John Hargreaves of Roughlee, William Smith of Roughlee and Nicholas Robinson of Roughlee, at the request of Miles Nutter, his wife Elizabeth and his son Richard surrendered half of a farm property in Roughlee (on rental of £0: 22s: 2d per annum) to the use of John Smith (son of William Smith of Roughlee), John Smith (son of William Smith of Pighole in Briercliffe), James and John Whittaker (sons of Giles Whittaker of Huncote, the brothers of Alice Nutter). The right of John Nutter (son of Miles) was reserved. The intent of the surrender was that the share in the farm was to go to the use of Miles Nutter and Elizabeth his wife and after their deaths a quarter share was to go to 'Alice Nutter, now wife of the said Richard Nutter for life, in the name of her dower.' The remainder of the property was to go to Richard and his heirs. This was possibly the farm on which John Smith built Roughlee Old Hall. Who, then, was Alice, wife of Dick O' Miles? The Whitaker family had been in the Padiham area since the thirteenth century and eventually split into three main branches; the Whitakers of Holme-in-Cliviger, the Whitakers of Broadclough and the family of Simonstone. Attached to this latter branch was Gyles Whitaker of Huncoat, he had been constable of Huncoat four times, greave of Huncoat in 1556 and was of sufficient importance to have been only one of two men to have appeared on the Muster Roll. Alice was one of Gyles Whitaker's five children, the others being the eldest, James, John, Agnes and Joan. There is no surprise in the fact that the Roughlee Nutters and the Huncoat Whitakers became related; although some five miles in distance the Simonstone Whitakers were continually trading lands within Pendle Forest. The most interesting personage connected with Roughlee is Alice Nutter, one of those accused of witchcraft, and hanged at Lancaster in 1612. She was the wife of Richard son of Miles Nutter, and had a son Miles and other children; her paternal name does not appear to be known. She stood out from the others accused as being 'a rich woman, [who] had a great estate and children of good hope: in the common opinion of the world, of good temper, free from envy or malice.' The charges against her were that she was present at the witches' meeting at Malkin Tower, and that with old Elizabeth Device she had conspired to kill Henry Mitton of Roughlee because he had refused to give Device a penny. She resolutely denied her guilt; as the recorder says, 'she died very impenitent, insomuch as her own children were never able to move her to confess any particular offence or declare anything, even in articulo mortis.'

Story.

Alice Nutter, a woman whose name would forever be entwined with the dark tale of witchcraft and persecution, had never lived at Roughlee Old Hall, despite the legends that had persisted for over four centuries. In the year 2023, this truth was finally brought to light.

Contrary to popular belief, Alice Nutter's true residence was on the Crowtrees estate, located half a mile to the west of Roughlee Old Hall. Additionally, the riches and estates that had been

attributed to her were mere fabrications. While she may have possessed more wealth than her companions in the Well Tower dungeon at Lancaster, any true fortune belonged to her Whitaker family, residing outside the forest.

A crucial aspect of the Alice Nutter legend was the belief that her own family had abandoned her during her trial and allowed her to be prosecuted in order to seize her estates. However, the reality was quite different. Alice's family, the Whitakers, had chosen not to intervene and speak up for her, but it was not for the reasons people assumed. They did so out of respect for her wishes and because the wealth tied to her name was not rightfully theirs.

Digging further into Alice Nutter's origins, it becomes evident that her maiden name was Alice O'Dick O'Miles. In 1561, a property exchange took place in Roughlee, orchestrated by Miles Nutter, Alice's father. He, along with his wife Elizabeth and his son Richard, surrendered half of a farm property to the use of various individuals, including Alice herself and her brothers James and John Whittaker. The property was intended for Alice and her husband Richard Nutter during their lifetimes, and afterwards, a quarter share was to be allocated to Alice as her dower. The remainder was to go to Richard and his heirs. This farm was possibly the very land on which Roughlee Old Hall was constructed by John Smith.

The question arises: Who exactly was Alice, the wife of Dick O'Miles? Alice hailed from the Whitaker family, which had a long-standing presence in the Padiham region since the thirteenth century. The Whitakers had split into three primary branches: the Whitakers of Holme-in-Cliviger, the Whitakers of Broadclough, and the family of Simonstone. Alice belonged to the Simonstone branch, specifically as one of the five children of Gyles Whitaker of Huncoat. Gyles was a notable figure in his own right, having served as constable of Huncoat multiple times and appearing on the Muster Roll, a testament to his significance. Apart from Alice, Gyles had four other children: James, John, Agnes, and Joan.

It comes as no surprise that the Roughlee Nutters and the Huncoat Whitakers became linked through marriage. Despite being approximately five miles apart, the Simonstone Whitakers frequently traded lands within Pendle Forest, forging connections between the families.

However, the most intriguing and tragic figure associated with Roughlee was none other than Alice Nutter herself. In the year 1612, she was accused of witchcraft and subsequently met her untimely end at Lancaster, where she was hanged. Alice was the wife of Richard, the son of Miles Nutter, and together they had a son named Miles, among other children. Regrettably, her paternal name remains unknown.

Alice stood apart from the other accused individuals, as she was described as a "rich woman" with significant wealth, children of promise, and a reputation for good temperament, devoid of envy or malice, as viewed by the common world. The charges brought against her included her alleged presence at the witches' gathering at Malkin Tower and a conspiracy with old Elizabeth Device to murder Henry Mitton of Roughlee due to his refusal to provide a penny to Device. Throughout her trial, Alice staunchly denied her guilt, refusing to confess any wrongdoing or disclose any information, even on the brink of death.

In the end, Alice Nutter met her fate with impenitence, leaving her own children unable to extract any admissions or revelations from her, not even in articulo mortis. Her story, intertwined with the tragic history of the Pendle Witch Trials, would forever leave an indelible mark on the annals of folklore and dark history, captivating the imaginations of generations to come.

By Donald Jay